

Proposed Improvements to the SEDAR Process

08/14/13

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The SEDAR Process was created to improve the quality and reliability of fishery stock assessments in the U.S. South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean. SEDAR emphasizes constituent and stakeholder participation in assessment development, transparency in the assessment process, and a rigorous and independent scientific review of completed stock assessments.

While serving as a national model for inclusiveness, transparency, and peer review in stock assessments since its creation, the need to improve the process's efficiency has taken on a sense of urgency as the need for assessments has increased. In the eleven years since its creation, SEDAR has implemented a number of changes in an effort to improve the process. We're recommending four additional modifications that will increase the efficiency of the process without losing any of its quality. All four recommended changes are based on practices already successfully used within Council processes in the southeastern U.S.

1. Create a SEDAR Methods Working Group (MWG) to approve data processing and assessment methods across SEDARs.

- **What are the problems being addressed?** Data and Assessment Workshops often spend considerable effort readdressing issues tackled by previous workshops. This process is inefficient and sometimes results in solutions that differ unnecessarily among SEDARs.
- **How would this solve the problem?** The MWG would review and approve conceptual issues common to multiple SEDARs. Once a method was approved by the MWG, it would be accepted as the standard for future SEDARs.
 - Two MWG subcommittees would be created: a Data Processing Subcommittee to handle issues typically handled at a Data Workshop and an Stock Assessment Subcommittee to handle issues typically handled at an Assessment Workshop.
 - MWG membership would include state agency scientists, NMFS scientists from the SEFSC and other regions, academics, SSC members, and possibly on occasion, CIE members (on major reviews).
 - The MWG would meet regularly. Initially the MWG would need to meet more often to handle a backlog of issues.
 - Given the broad make-up of the MWG, more thorough discussions will be possible than through individual Data and Assessment Workshops.
- **How is this different than what we're doing now?** Instead of being addressed repeatedly in multiple SEDAR Workshops, many conceptual

issues would be addressed once by the MWG. Fewer SEDAR workshops would be required, and as a result, fewer resources (time, labor, travel, cost) would be required. Approaches would become more standardized across regions and SEDARs. As a result, the process would become more efficient.

- **What is the precedent for this within the Council process?** The MWG can be thought of as an expansion of SEDAR Technical Workshops, previous meetings where conceptual issues (e.g., data indices, time-varying catchability) were addressed generally, across SEDARs, regions, and stocks.

2. Create SEDAR Stakeholder Advisory Panels (SAPs) to facilitate stakeholder participation in the SEDAR process.

- **What are the problems being addressed?** Communication between stakeholders and SEDAR scientists is often suboptimal because stakeholder involvement and familiarity with the issues is limited. In addition, because new stakeholders are appointed to each SEDAR, advice is inconsistent across regions and SEDARs.
- **How would this solve the problem?** SEDAR SAPs would facilitate education for stakeholder representatives and increase effective communication from stakeholders into the process.
 - SEDAR SAPs would advise the SEDAR process similar to the way Council SAPs advise the Council process.
 - SEDAR SAPs would be created to represent specific stock groupings (e.g., snapper/grouper, King and Spanish mackerel).
 - Educational workshops would be created to increase SEDAR SAP members' knowledge of data and stock assessment-related issues.
 - SEDAR SAPs would represent stakeholder concerns during SEDAR data, assessment and methods workshops.
 - Membership terms within a SEDAR SAP would be for multiple years, allowing continuity across SEDARs.
- **How is this different than what we're doing now?** Stakeholders would be more involved within the SEDAR process, being represented by a panel whose membership would have continuity over time and would be more educated as to the critical issues.
- **What is the precedent for this within the Council process?** Stakeholder Advisory Panels are utilized to effectively represent stakeholders in each Council currently. This merely takes a highly effective component of the Council process and expands its application.

3. Reduce the frequency of Benchmark assessments and the three associated workshops (data, assessment and review) .

- **What are the problems being addressed?** Assessments are often designated as "benchmarks" even when relatively standard approaches are being applied to stocks that have been previously assessed via the SEDAR

process. Data Workshops and Assessment Workshops take a tremendous amount of resources (time, labor, travel, and cost) and are a large drain on the SEDAR process. Many of the same topics are covered over multiple SEDARs.

- **How would this solve the problem?** With the creation of the MWG, the need for Data and Assessment Workshops will decrease, and when they are needed, their duration will decrease.
 - Benchmarks should be reserved for stocks being assessed for the first time and for stocks where significant issues have not been previously resolved by the MWG (for example, when a new assessment model is used for the first time in any SEDAR process).
 - Data Workshops will occur as needed for Benchmark assessments, but are expected to decrease in length and number of topics covered as the MWG addresses more data issues over time. Data webinars may be helpful for Update assessments to facilitate participation by the SEDAR Stakeholder Advisory Panel.
 - Assessment Workshops and Panels would not be needed for Updates and will decrease in length and number of topics covered as the MWG addresses more issues over time. Assessment scientists would use a small number of webinars to inform members of the SEDAR community as to the methods being used and their status in the process for Updates.
- **How is this different than what we're doing now?** Currently data and assessment workshops address issues and topics that are common across regions and species. Implementing the MWG concept would allow for fewer Benchmarks and workshops, and with it, fewer resources being spent, creating a more efficient process.
- **What is the precedent for this within the Council process?** The concept of an Update Assessment was previously approved so that additional meetings and resources would not be needed to discuss issues that had already been resolved. The creation of the MWG would resolve many additional issues, expanding the number and proportion of SEDARs either not requiring Data and Assessment Workshops or requiring abbreviated Workshops.

4. Place a greater amount of the responsibility for assessment reviews on the SSCs and a lesser amount on the CIE.

- **What are the problems being addressed?** Peer Review Workshops are heavily resource intensive (time, labor, travel, and cost) and CIE reviewers less familiar with Southeast stocks and methods have at times caused inadvertent obstructions in the process.
- **How would this solve the problem?** Allow the SSCs to be the primary reviewers of all SEDAR assessments. Ask the CIE for desk reviews on benchmarks, to serve as additional input to the SSCs prior to their reviews.
 - National Standard 2 allows SSCs to serve as assessment reviewers.

- The SSCs have been serving as the primary reviewers for SEDAR updates and as final reviewers for benchmarks already.
 - The CIE would continue to provide input into the review process on benchmarks, but as desk reviewers, no individual reviewer would be able to approve or disapprove an assessment. The final judgment would come down to the SSCs.
- **How is this different than what we're doing now?** Resource intensive (time, labor, travel, and cost) Peer Review Workshops would be replaced with desk reviews and increased SSC responsibility and participation.
- **What is the precedent for this within the Council process?** The SSCs already review SEDAR Updates and provide final review to SEDAR Benchmarks. Newly published National Standard 2 allows the SSC to serve in this expanded role.